



Miss Wyckoff and Supervisor going across the rice fields

# Vadaku-

(Va'-da-koo

Put'-ta-ray)

# Pattrai

CHARLOTTE C. WYCKOFF

# VADAKKU-PATTRAI

*Conditions in the front-line-trenches.*

CHARLOTTE C. WYCKOFF



IT was a clear and sunny Sunday morning in November, in the hot month that intervened between the heavy monsoon and the heavier cyclone of 1930. Miss Arputham, the Supervisor and I drove a mile from the Travellers' Bungalow at Guidiyattam where we were camping, and then left the Ford to walk across the fields. The Christian cultivators of that vast stretch of lovely green paddy had purposely postponed its daily irrigation so that I might not get my shoes too wet,—a very courteous act, much appreciated by one who has teetered precariously across so many narrow bunds between flooded fields that she wishes for a course in tight-rope walking as preparation for village-work. As we made our way across the sea of green, a very talkative woman followed us along, asking a hundred questions to the minute. "A good thing you are here," she remarked to Miss Arputham, "Otherwise I should never have dared to approach this great lady. I am afraid to talk to people who wear shoes and a hat." She showed no signs of cringing, however, when she found the "great lady" willing to listen to her chatter. After a mile or two of sheer loveliness,—sunlight on palms and paddy, blue hills all around,—we jumped across a wide irrigation channel and found ourselves in the village, a cluster of mud huts under cocoanut palms. In the shed which serves as a church and school, we found the children waiting, listening to the song-singing box (gramophone), all ready for "Sunday School." Zinnias from their garden brightened the one table, and fragrant tiny chrysanthemums from Gudiyattam were placed in heavy garlands



Children listening to the song-singing box—Gramophone

round our necks. The children sang song after song for us, with more tune than most village-children, and recited all their "Golden Texts", rising one by one, from the smallest, fattest little boy to the tallest shyest little girl to fold their arms tightly on their chests, cast their eyes to the ceiling and recite all in one breath, then collapse hastily on the floor. Miss Arphutham then told them a beautiful Christmas story in her inimitable way. Before she finished the shed was crowded to the doors (if it had had any doors!) with all the older people of the village. With no further formality "Sunday School," ended and "Church" began. The women,



with their sarees draped over their heads, sit on one side holding restless babies. The men sat on the other side, and the children were squashed into a very small space at the front. After some singing and reciting of a psalm and the Commandments and Creed, in which every man, woman and child took part, I told a story for the children. We then sent them out to the shade of a tree with Miss Arputham, each carrying his baby brother or sister off on his or her hip, so the men and women settled down in peace and comfort to hear my "sermon". They were a very attentive, inspiring audience of plain pious people, showing by their quick response that Christ means something to them. When the service was ended they did not want to go but sat on singing song after song. Some of the women stood up bravely, right in front of the men, and told a Bible story. Until you have been to people newly become Christian and have seen how difficult it is to get them to come in and sit down under the same roof with their menfolk, you can't appreciate what a triumph of Christianity this is. I never appreciated the parables of Jesus 'till I heard them told, with many unconscious embellishments, by simple, illiterate Christian villagers. Only the East can fully appreciate Jesus' stories. Here are some of the extra touches which I have heard from the lips of village women:

"And so the disciples brought leaves from the plantain-trees and they sat the people down in rows, the men on one side and the women on the other, and began to serve the *appams* (rice cakes) and the fried fish to them. No matter how much they gave out there was more and more, and there were twelve whole baskets left."

"So the prodigal son went to a rich Reddy and asked for work. The only work was to herd pigs. But he did not know anything about pigs. 'What am I to do for them?' he asked the Reddy. 'Must I climb trees and get leaves for them to

eat? Must I rock them in a cradle like a baby? I have never seen a pig. Have they horns and will they butt me like a goat?" . . . And so he herded the pigs and took every day one handful of their bran, because the rice-water which the Reddy gave him did not fill his stomach. But the Reddy noticed that the pigs were growing thinner and losing weight, so he suspected. . . " etc., etc.

Often when I have showed and explained the picture of the Crucifixion, either with the magic lantern or from a picture-roll, the tears fall freely when I tell how Jesus remembered his mother. "See!" remarked one old woman, wiping her eyes on the end of her saree. "She has turned her face away. She can't bear to look." "Would the mother that bore him be able to look?" sobbed another.

When at last we left the shed, I went round the village visiting the homes. Our Christians there are better off than most of our Christian community. There were numbers of thin cattle in every house,—tied up, poor things, for a longer time than usual because of my visit. Their presence in the courtyard does not add to the sanitation and attractiveness of the house, but they do stand for prosperity! In Vadakku-pattrai many of the cow-sheds were at the front door. When you entered you first had to push past quite terrifying bulls and water-buffaloes with their long, curving horns, and spunky billy-goats who looked anxious to butt you, and so into the central court. On the other side of the court you would find the long hut, sub-divided into partitions for each married son of the family. If it were a big family, these separate "apartments" would run around three sides of the court, the cow-shed making the fourth. When I went in after church I found a woman in each room, beginning to pound the husk off the paddy in a round hole for a pestle in the centre of the floor. In one dark corner she had set water to boiling for rice, over an earthen fire-place on the floor.

A brass water-pot or two, two or three wooden boxes, a palm-leaf mat rolled up in the corner, her husband's plough and scythe and a net for catching fish in the tank, were the only furniture. The only ventilation was through the door, which would be shut at night, and even in mid-morning I could not



A Home

see anything 'till my eyes got used to the dimness, after coming in out of the glare of the sun.

In two or three houses they announced proudly, "My daughter is at Chittoor School" or "My son is studying carpentry at Katpadi."

When at last we returned to the teacher's house, they brought us young cocoanuts from which to drink the delicious



water and showed us with great pride the group picture taken last New Year's Day. I heard then the story of the village, as we sat on the *thinnai* or tiny "front porch" of the teacher's mud-house.

Ten years ago there was not a Christian in the village. Only one boy was ambitious for an education, and he walked over every day to attend the school at another village, two miles across the fields, where there was a Christian teacher. He was a man of small education but of devoted Christian life, whose influence over one small ten-year-old boy brought the whole village of Vadakku-pattrai to Christ. Between 1920 and 1930 the congregation of Vadakku-pattrai increased from that one boy and his family to the large number. Now the people are collecting money to build a more substantial church, and have secured a grant from the Mission to help them.

Mr. and Mrs. M. are doing much to build up the village. She is one of the gallant little Indian Christian women who does a man's job and a woman's too. Every morning she walks three miles to teach in a municipal school in Gudiyattam, back at noon to cook for her husband and children, again to town for the afternoon, and home again at night. She has three little children. When they are asleep and the work all done, she gathers the village women and teaches them the songs and stories which I heard in the morning, and coaches the school-children to act little plays and do the South Indian clap-dances known as *kummi*. It is such women as this who can build up the Kingdom of God in the villages by uplifting the Christian women. Their example of cleanliness and neatness preaches more sermons than any visitor. Yet our Mission funds are so low that we cannot pay a living wage, so the woman must wear out her energy in teaching in the nearby town to get the money for educating her children, while her husband teaches the village school.

After a happy morning we bid goodbye to the friendly people of Vadakku-pattrai who accompanied us to the irrigation channel. "When will you come again?" they all asked, and the children clung to Miss Arputham, still begging for another story. The old Headman walked part way across the fields before he left us with the courteous "Go and come again." As we trudged the two hot miles back to the Travellers' Bungalow, my mind travelled back over other villages I have seen where, in sixty or more years of being Christian they have not come so far as these people in understanding and using "the riches of Christ". So much depends on the village catechist and his wife. Poorly paid, poorly housed, isolated from their friends and family—they hold the front-line trenches with no reinforcements and little relief. In the monsoon-rains their houses melt away and their babies get pneumonia. They themselves toil on through illness and difficulty. What wonder if their courage fails and they fall before the enemy, or at least fail to make advance? What wonder if, increasingly, only the "ne're-do-well" in other jobs can be persuaded to take service in the "Village Forces". God bless the gallant men and women who are holding on and doing fine work in spite of it all, and send us the funds to strengthen their hands with decent living-conditions. They need a house that can be a haven to them and an ideal to the village people who do not know how to make their homes comfortable. They need medical attention and enough salary to have good food. Above all, they need the inspiration of conferences and institutes, of books and magazines, to nourish their minds and souls, and keep up their morale. If you wonder why the battle is so long, the victory so delayed—look at "conditions in the front-line-trenches!"

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